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FORCE THE TORIES OUT!

We have a Tory minority government. But how long Theresa May, or any Tory, can stay is another matter.

The Tories look likely get a working majority in Parliament, at least on budget and confidence votes, by a deal with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

There will be divisions between the Tories and the DUP, and within the Tory Party, as the talks on Brexit proceed and as economic stresses sharpen. The Tories are likely to drop more abrasive policies like reintroduction of grammar schools, but they are in deep trouble.

Labour was right to call immediately for May to resign and to say that Labour is ready to form a minority government.

A Tory minority government will not fall automatically. It will fall if Labour continues the energy from the doorsteps, and recycles it as energy on the streets and in workplace trade-union organising.

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Saudi Arabia tries to push Qatar into line

By Dan Katz

A simmering conflict between the Gulf State of Qatar and its larger neighbour, Saudi Arabia, has abruptly flared into an open, serious stand-off.

Beginning on 5 June, a Saudi-led grouping of states including Egypt, Bahrain and UAE broke off diplomatic relations, and implemented travel and trade bans against Qatar. Qatar has said it will not retaliate.

Saudi Arabia has closed Qatar's only land border and ordered its citizens to leave Qatar. UAE, Egyptian and Saudi ports have refused to allow Qatari ships to dock.

80% of Qatar's food comes from its Gulf neighbours and 40% comes across the land border with Saudi Arabia. In response to the blockade Iran sent five plane-loads of food. Iran has also opened its airspace to Qatari flights.

Iran is seeking to benefit from the disarray among the Sunni Gulf states. And the Saudis might have adopted a tactic that could produce exactly what they fear most: more Iranian influence in their backyard.

Qatar has also received support from its regional ally, Turkey. The Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called for the lifting of the sanctions and the parliament has passed legislation allowing Turkey to provide military help to Qatar.

The Saudis accuse Qatar of supporting terrorist organisations and being too close to Iran. This dispute



Dictators fall out. Saudi Arabia's king (right) and the emir of Qatar (left) in happier times.

is a more-serious re-run of a similar crisis in 2014.

In March 2014 Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE removed their ambassadors, claiming Qatar was interfering in their internal affairs. That conflict was solved after Qatar told members of the Muslim Brotherhood to leave. That indicates one of the real, underlying issues in this dispute: Qatar backs the Muslim Brothers and Hamas and the Saudis are scared of their influence.

The Egyptian military government, too, regards the Brothers as its number one enemy.

OPPOSITIONISTS

The Saudis seem to believe that Qatar is also aiding or sheltering Saudi oppositionists.

In fact both the contending states — Qatar and Saudi Arabia — have funded extremist Sunni militias in the Syrian civil war and elsewhere. The Saudis have also provided bil-

lions of dollars to fund fundamentalist, Wahhabi-aligned mosques across the world which have been an ideological breeding ground for jihadist groups. And much funding for Daesh (IS) and al-Qaeda comes from individuals in Saudi Arabia — something the Saudis have failed to prevent.

Recently the Qataris paid a huge ransom — apparently around \$1billion — to secure the release of Qatari royal family members kidnapped in southern Iraq. The kidnappers were Shia militia members linked to Iran. Much of the ransom is believed to have gone to Iran.

It seems this deal was linked to a complicated exchange of populations from Shia and Sunni villages and the release of prisoners in Syria. Apparently the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda was also involved, releasing Hezbollah fighters as part of the agreement. This deal has also angered the Saudis.

Although Qatar has been active in the Saudi coalition's squalid war in Yemen — where the opposition is backed by Iran — and in Syria, where Qatar has funded groups which have fought the Iranian-backed government and Lebanese Hezbollah, the Saudis also believe Qatar is too close to Iran.

Qatar does have reasonable relations with Iran. Qatar had a self-imposed restriction against working with Iran to extract the gas of the South Pars-North Dome gas field until it signed an agreement with Iran in April 2017. The world's largest natural gas resource, it is jointly owned by Iran and Qatar.

Qatar, facing Iran across the Gulf, clearly has economic and political reasons to want to maintain working relations with Iran. This also seems to be one reason that Saudi Arabia has had loud backing from Donald Trump for the move against Qatar. Trump agrees with the Saudis that a more aggressive

policy must be conducted against Iran — although other American government spokespeople have been more cautious, urging the Saudis to use restraint, in contradiction to Trump.

TRUMP

Trump even claims to have taken part in the Saudi decision to take action against Qatar, having been in Saudi Arabia recently.

Trump's comments come despite the fact that the US has a major air base, Al Udeid, in Qatar, which is home to 11,000 American military personnel.

The German Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, has called for an end to the blockade and a diplomatic solution. Alarmed, Gabriel told a German paper that the crisis was so dramatic it could even spiral into war.

Qatar was a British protectorate until 1971. Formerly a poor state, it has been transformed by the exploitation of enormous gas fields.

2.7 million people live in Qatar, of whom only 300,000 (12%) are Qatari. Migrant workers, many from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, are often very badly treated. Labour rights are trampled on and migrants are often abused, badly paid, working very long hours in unsafe conditions.

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani took power from his father in 2013. He is British public school and Sandhurst educated. His authoritarian regime uses sharia law, including regular use of corporal punishment for offences such as drinking alcohol and adultery.

In the past Qatar was effectively dominated by Saudi Arabia. But Qatar's great wealth has freed it to develop its own independent politics. One element of Qatar's policy was the development of the international TV broadcaster Al Jazeera, which is owned by the government. Although Arabic Al-Jazeera does not criticise the rulers of Saudi Arabia, it does advocate a very different policy. And it has caused the Egyptian military, for example, acute embarrassment when it showed the civilian casualties of Egyptian bombing in Libya.

In Libya the UAE, along with Egypt, has backed former army commander Khalifa Haftar, appointed by a government and parliament based in the East. Qatar and Turkey have supported rival Islamist groups in Western Libya. Last Friday Saudi Arabia and its allies issued a list of individuals and organisations they regard as Qatari-backed terrorists, including five Libyans, among them Tripoli Grand Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani, an influential figure for anti-Haftar militias in western Libya.

Saudi Arabia has now prevented Al Jazeera broadcasting to the Kingdom and has shut its local office. The Saudis want Al Jazeera shut down.

Contrast and compare

British Labour Party: continued pink-neoliberal policy from 1997 through to 2015, with a shade more pink from 2010.

It went down from 43% of the poll in 1997 to 29% in 2010, and recovered only to 30.5% in 2015.

2017: left policy. Share of poll up to 40%, and overall turnout up to 69% (which still leaves much work to do, but...). 3.5 million extra votes gained.

French Socialist Party: continued pink-neoliberal policy. 2012: won the presidency and a parliamentary majority (with small allied parties). 2017: down to 6% of the vote in the presidential election, and 9% (with its small allies) in the legislative elections. That 9% was 9% of a record-low turnout of only 49%, so only 4.6% of the electorate.

Dutch Labour Party: continued pink-neoliberal policy. 2012: 25% of the vote, not much below its best-ever levels of around 30%. Became junior partner in a coalition government with a liberal-Tory party. 2017: 6% of the vote.

Macron: a landslide with 15%?

The socialist newsletter *Arguments pour la Lutte Sociale* reports on the first round of France's legislative elections (11 June).

The dominant feature of the first round is not the triumph of Macron, but the majority [51%] abstention, for the first time in a legislative ballot in France.

It looks like the lowest-income groups and the youth have massively abstained. From the start the newly elected assembly will be one suspended in mid-air.

That trait is accentuated by the second main feature, which is the success of [Macron's] *En Marche* candidates, even where they were complete unknowns. They form what will clearly be a clientele, and not a parliamentary group.

In proportion to the electorate (thus not counting the unregistered) it was 15% for Macron. Can the Fifth Republic regenerate itself from what must be designated by this oxymoron: a minority plebiscite?

It was helped by the presentation, almost everywhere, of France Insoumise [Mélenchon] candi-

dates using the same personalised method, which did not enable Mélenchon to reproduce his score of 23 April, but helped the Macronists or the right win through in a majority of constituencies.

In the second round, where PCF candidates, or non-Macronist Socialist Party candidates, or Ensemble, are present, vote for them.

The France Insoumise candidates present in the second round must be considered case-by-case. The claimed nature of this organisation, as a "movement" aimed at ending parties, directly based on an inter-classist ideology, rules out a blanket vote for it by serious worker militants from voting indiscriminately for it. It is therefore necessary to pick out the situations in which it is possible to draw them into unity against the smashing of Labour Code and for the defence of civil liberties.

In the majority of constituencies, where the second round is between Macronists and the right, the strongest possible abstention is the best demonstration to deprive the next assembly, the government, and the president of legitimacy.

Prosperity for the few, stagnation for the many

By Martin Thomas

Right-wingers are trumpeting the claimed prosperity of the US economy since Trump's election, and of the British economy after Brexit. A closer look shows the prosperity as very partial.

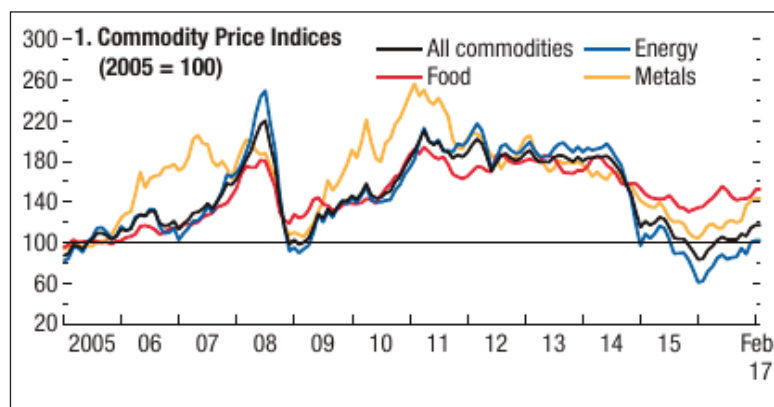
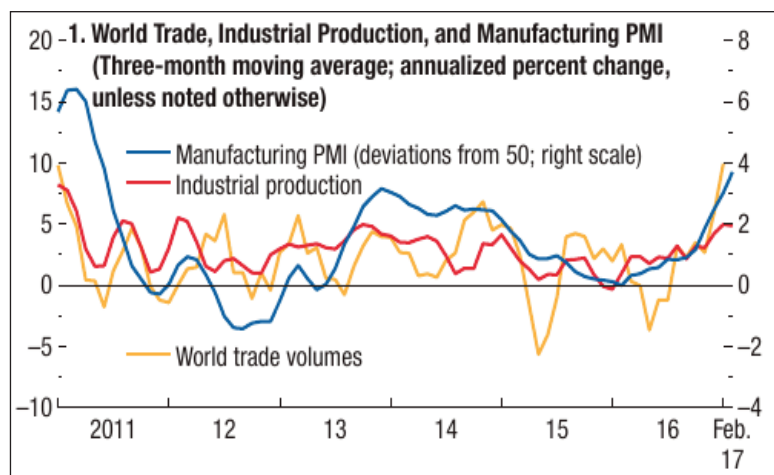
Stock market prices in the USA have risen strongly since November 2016, though no more than their general rising trend since they hit bottom in March 2009. The slice of corporate profits in total US income is as high as it was at its pre-2008 peak, which in turn was the highest since 1965. Unemployment in the USA continues to fall towards 4% from its 10% peak in 2009.

Its workforce participation has also been falling, since 2008, indicating that more and more people don't even bother to register as unemployed.

The FTSE 100 index of share prices in the UK is also rising, and has been rising since early 2009 with something of a dip in 2015-16. Profitability of UK corporations, outside North Sea oil and banking, is now way above pre-2008 peaks.

Unemployment in the UK is also on a falling trend, at 4.6% now compared to its peak of 8.5%. That peak came not in 2009 but in the second dip, generated by Tory government cuts and eurozone turmoil, in 2012. In the UK the workforce participation rate is going up, and at an all-time-record level.

There is some capitalist recovery. It is way short of a boom. And it is not special to Britain and the USA. It means no more than that the usual cyclical revival from slump has continued, and that a crisis which looked like crashing it has



not ensued.

In 2015 and 2016 it looked likely that the 2008 global credit crash, and the 2010-2012 eurozone government-debt mess, would be followed by crashes in the "emerging economies" arising from private corporations in these economies having racked up huge debts in the previous phases when they seemed the most prosperous capitalist sector.

That has not happened. The Chinese economy is still showing 6-7%

growth, though the statistics are unreliable. The Chinese stock market crash of 2015-16 did not result in a general crash. The Chinese economy still has a mountain of bad debt, but it is not toppling.

The IMF estimates that Russia's economy is "bottoming out". Brazil's economy is still in prolonged depression, but flat rather than crashing. The Indian economy is growing quite fast.

Commodity prices — oil, metals and so on — which had slumped

heavily, have started increasing again a little, which in capitalist terms is good news, because it means that exporters aren't ruined and deflation does not spread.

For the first time since 2009, world trade is now increasing faster than production. The failure of trade to outpace production since 2009 was a break with the whole history since World War 2.

Central banks are beginning to nudge back towards normal interest rates, though they are still very low.

The twist in this tepid recovery is low investment, low growth of productivity, and low growth in wages. Labour productivity in the USA grew only 1.1% per year between the 2007-8 crash and late 2016, a lower rate than in any recovery phase since 1948.

Gross fixed capital formation in both the USA and the UK, inflation-adjusted, is still below its less-than-gaudy 2006-7 peak. In the eurozone it is well below that peak.

In the UK, output per hour worked is still only 0.1% higher than it was ten years ago, in 2007. If it had been rising at the trend rate for 1971 to 2007, it would be 23% higher.

In the eurozone, labour productivity has risen faster, but still slower than in previous periods.

Real wages in the UK were lower in spring 2017 than in spring 2016, and much lower than in 2007. According to the Resolution Foundation think-tank, "this decade [2011-2020] is set to be the worst in over 200 years for pay packets". Cuts in services and benefits intensify the increase in social inequality.

Life expectancy in the USA has declined among poorer white males, with more deaths from drug

overdoses, liver disease and suicide. Death rates in the UK have also risen: researchers link that to NHS cuts.

Thus, we have an economic recovery, the only economic recovery world capitalism shows signs of delivering before, sooner or later, the mismatches built into the system, and not at all mended since 2008, bring us a new crash.

But, where some capitalist recoveries bring technical advances of great potential value, and increases in working-class living standards, this one has been meagre.

Bureaucratic weakness and timidity by trade-union leaders is part of the reason for wage slowness. Another part is that the recovery, in capitalist terms, is so flat and fragile that corporations prefer to draw large profits, dividends, and top pay from slightly-expanding markets with low wages and low equipment-replacement costs rather than venture big investments.

The flatness and fragility determine the political erosion of mainstream neoliberalism after its decades of triumph and after its rapid reassertion of its grip after it was bewildered in 2008. They also mean that the economic padding to soften the adverse economic impact of Brexit, or of Trump's possible trade disruptions, is thin.

At the same time, publications like *Computer Weekly* say: "software robots will soon automate 80% of repetitive tasks currently being done by people... triple productivity" (30/1/17).

Technologies may have the potential to do that. Capitalism is not doing it now, nor likely to do it in the next few years.

More police no answer to terrorists

By Simon Nelson

The London Bridge terror attack was a stark reminder of the ease with which Daesh-inspired Islamists can kill and maim people when there is very little that the police or security services can do to stop them.

Yet the focus on how to stop these attacks has been on increased policing on the streets, clampdowns on civil liberties and increased monitoring of the internet.

Theresa May has even said that she will not let human rights get in the way of her drive to stamp out terrorism.

May says she wants "to deprive the extremists of their safe spaces online". As Amber Rudd has previously argued the Tories want a backdoor to access encrypted messages and to be able to censor media, or more specifically have Google, Facebook, Twitter etc. censor it for us.

The government is very comfortable with computer algorithms

written by large companies deciding what we can and cannot see.

Such an approach is both doomed to failure and damages freedom of expression. "Extremism" in many guises operates on parts of the web that are most immune to the solutions the government plans. The government want to sound tough but they have no real means of implementing their own solution.

Inevitably any "backdoor" would also be used by criminals, terrorists and oppressive regimes across the globe. Politicians appear to have very little knowledge about how encryption works.

To undercut the influence of Daesh and other Islamist killers there are no short cuts. We need to build a strong labour movement that fights to save and improve services and education, fights for decent jobs for young people and counters and challenges the cult of death of Daesh with the politics of reason and hope.

Labour is wrong on press freedom

By Gerry Bates

Labour's manifesto committed the party to implement the recommendations in part one of the Leveson enquiry.

That would mean supporting Section 40 of the current Crime and Court Act. Under this law newspapers (including *Solidarity*) have to pay their opponents' legal costs in libel and privacy cases, even if they win! Publishers can avoid these charges by signing up with Impress, the recognised regulator financed by Max Mosley.

Both the Society of Editors and the National Union of Journalists are against all of Leveson's recommendations. They said:

"Section 40 would have a seriously chilling effect upon [our] work. The financial implications aside, [we] would be simply less inclined to pursue investigations in the public interest when the risk of crippling legal costs would be increased. The legislation is not only at odds with the principle

that justice should be fair, it seeks to punish those same newspapers that the Labour Party claims to value and fine them for telling the truth.

"It is widely accepted that local and regional newspapers were not the focus of Leveson, nor did they have anything to do with phone hacking. Lord Justice Leveson was also at pains to state that his recommendations should not provide an added burden to the regional and local press. Section 40 is fundamentally inconsistent with the principle of press freedom.

"The potential impact to the quality, investigative, campaigning journalism we fight for every day is clear...The punitive elements of Section 40, however, must be held back. It is untenable for any newspaper or magazine to face bearing both sides' costs when vexatious litigants initiate action.

"The union also believes the relationship between some newspapers and the police must also be

investigated as part of Leveson 2. The commitments made to scores of victims, journalists among them, who have an understandable desire for the truth to be uncovered must be implemented. Journalists were scapegoated in the aftermath of hacking and we now know deals were done with the police to protect the companies responsible. At the time when another move is in play for the Murdochs to get their hands on BSkyB, dodging a meaningful investigation into what really went on should be untenable for anyone who cares about journalism."

It is right that Corbyn and the Labour Party want to challenge the dominance and influence of the big media companies.

Further state regulation including massive financial penalties that the likes of Murdoch and Rothermere, but not *Solidarity* or even mainstream local newspapers, can afford, would be wholly regressive.

Women need equality in law!

The writer in *Solidarity* 440 who argues against the attempt in India to ban the practice of triple talaq (where a Muslim man can divorce his wife by saying the word talaq three times) is, I believe, wrong.

Unless I misunderstand the argument, I think the writer takes a one-sided view of the importance of religious freedom, to the point of sanctifying in advance all practices done in the name of religion and religious tradition, no matter how oppressive.

Granted, the Indian context is one where secularism may mask sectarianism. The rise of Hindu nationalism is indeed worrying for the Muslim population and other smaller religious minorities. That the move to ban triple talaq is being promoted by right wing Hindu groups and opposed by some Muslim women is important.

However there are other bigger matters or principle here. That women should have equality in law is one of first principles of building a more gender equal society. If that equality contradicts religious practice (which in this case, as so often, is in any case disputed), equality comes first.

One cannot equate the unjustifiable banning of the burkha in Europe with the banning of the triple talaq in India. The burkha (or hijab or niqab) may be worn out of religious belief, or a sense of identity. Equally it may be worn out of a sense of duty or under the oppressive authorities of "elders". Nonetheless it is, basically, a voluntary act.

In contrast the triple talaq (informal divorce procedures) in India, as I understand it, allows divorcing men to evade making any financial settlement with their ex-wives. It leaves women and sometimes children vulnerable to destitution.

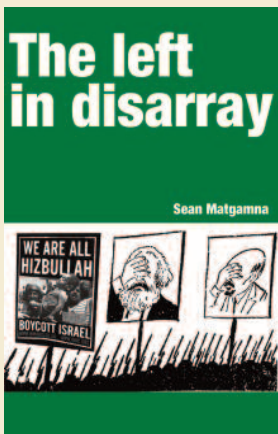
Women from all religious backgrounds and none must have equality in law. As long as marriage institutions exist, women must have the right to enter and exit them without any form of coercion.

Obstacles to these basic rights are many — they include dowry obligations as much as the triple talaq. All of this must go.

Cathy Nugent

A new book from Workers' Liberty

A new book edited by Sean Matgamna. This book tries to trace an accurate, self-critical narrative of the turns and realignments successively imprinted on this left by the ascendancy of Stalinism, by the



bewilderments of the late 1940s. It charts the demarcations of the left over global political issues.

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Socialism is not just 99% versus 1%

LETTERS

I am grateful to Martin Thomas for his response to my letter (*Solidarity* 439).

Rather than seeking to avoid measures which would invite "a counter revolutionary reaction", I was attempting to point out the very tight limits of social-democratic reformism i.e. if you try and raise really serious amounts of revenue from the rich to pay for your reform programme, such a government will very quickly run into serious trouble.

I wasn't suggesting we reduce our ambitions for governmental power, but that these need to be much more radical and make at minimum very deep inroads into the wealth and the power of the capitalist class.

Martin draws a different analytical conclusion than Charlotte Zalens in her original article (*Solidarity* 436) where she pointed out the exponentially high incomes of those in the top 5%, 1% and the 0.1%. That doesn't seem to fit with Martin's assertion that "more income in total goes to that relatively large number of (middle classes) than to the few at the very top".

I do agree with Martin's comment "that socialism is not a matter of the 99% versus the 1%". As well as obviously including the whole of the working class (broadly defined as those dependent on a wage or salary to survive), the 99% must include all of the middle class and a significant slice of the bourgeoisie. That type of cross-class alliance will never carry out a socialist revolution. We must aim to expropriate the whole of the capitalist class, not one section of it.

If members of the middle and capitalist class can be persuaded that their survival and future is better in a collectivist and more equal society, then that is to the good, and we should actively seek to exploit competing in-



terests and contradictions within those classes and to divide, disorganise and destroy their forces.

I would like to commend Martin on his article (*Solidarity* 438) which I think illustrates some of the best qualities of a lot of writing in *Solidarity*.

In a very clear and lucid way, and making a number of very cautious assumptions and caveats, Martin shows that the working class in this country generates around £40,000 per worker of surplus value (over and above wages, benefits and pensions for workers, and the social wage on education and health), which is taken (expropriated) by the capitalist class as income, spending on the state and investment in capital, equivalent to around £1,000 billion per annum.

This is an astounding figure and shows the technical affordability of even a very radical left wing manifesto.

If, under socialism, productivity remained the same (likely to increase), we increased wages etc, public spending and investment in what would be socially owned means of production and in distribution, all by 50% (say), society will still produce a surplus of £130 billion, based on Martin's numbers and assumptions.

This I think illustrates the sheer moral, economic and social bankruptcy of capitalism, the appalling inequality in wealth, income, power and opportunity.

It is the reason why so many working people have such a desperate time in what is means to be the fifth richest economy in the world, and the potential immense power of socialism as a credible and compelling response to this.

Andrew Northall

Help us raise £20,000 to improve our website

We need to build a left that is open to debate and is serious about self-education.

Our website, including its extensive archive could help build a different kind of socialist culture — one where discussion and self-education are cherished.

From Trotskyist newspapers of the 1940s and 50s, to older Marxist classics, to discussion articles on feminism, national questions, religion and philosophy and resources such as guidelines for Marxist reading groups — it's all there on the Workers' Liberty website.

But to make our archive of real use we need professional help to make all content fully integrated, searchable by date and subject and optimised for mobile reading. We need to finance a website co-ordinator to ensure our news coverage is up to the minute and shared on social media. We want to raise £20,000 by our conference in November 2017. Any amount will help.

- If you would like to donate by paypal go to www.workersliberty.org/donate
- Or set up an internet bank transfer to "AWL", account 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, Birmingham, 60-83-01 (please email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us of the payment and what it's for); or
- Send a cheque payable to "AWL" to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (with a note saying what it's for).

Take a look at www.workersliberty.org



• In the two weeks thanks are due to *Solidarity* sellers have donated a total of £1470.



Workers' Liberty comrade Joe Booth and his dog Summer walked ten miles along the Lea Valley from Tottenham Locks to Cheshunt and raised £420 in sponsorship on Sunday 11 June.

Labour should force the Tories out!

We have a Tory minority government. But how long Theresa May, or any Tory, can stay is another matter.

The Tories look likely get a working majority in Parliament, at least on budget and confidence votes, by a deal with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

There will be divisions between the Tories and the DUP, and within the Tory Party as the talks on Brexit proceed and as economic stresses sharpen. The Tories are likely to drop more abrasive policies like reintroduction of grammar schools, but they are in deep trouble.

Labour was right to call immediately for May to resign and to say that Labour is ready to form a minority government.

A Tory minority government will not fall automatically. It will fall if Labour continues the energy from the doorsteps, and recycles it as energy on the streets and in workplace trade-union organising.

Labour manifesto planks should be campaigned on now. Organising for the £10 minimum wage, particularly in the service sector where many young people work, can link building the Labour Party with building strong workplace and trade union organisation.

Demonstrations and protests on the NHS and social care cuts should build up unmanageable pressure on the Tories.

BBC news (12 June) said 25,000 new members had joined Labour since the election. The Labour left group Momentum reported early on Sunday 12 June that 1,300 new people had joined it that weekend.

The 8 June general election was a stunning success for the Labour Party, and a crashing defeat for May's scheme to hugely increase her Parliamentary majority.

At the start of the campaign, the Tory Party had a 20% poll lead over Labour. Labour's result was partly down to a reaction against May's arrogance and dismay over issues such as the "dementia tax", but much more.

The Labour manifesto had serious limitations, and faults, such as renouncing freedom of movement in Europe. Yet in it Labour issued a clarion call against the ideologues of "capitalist realism" who say that poverty and inequality are inevitable, or even the fault of the people who are capitalism's victims.

It pledged to bring the railways, the post, water and the national grid into public ownership; to make university tuition free; to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour; to ban zero-hour contracts; to restore the NHS and social care; to pay for all that and more by taxing corporations and the richest 5%; and to expand workplace rights.

Those pledges allowed Labour to increase its vote to 40% of an increased overall turnout (69%), with a net gain of 30 seats. By challenging the consensus and offering bold, left-wing policies, Labour won back support.

Labour's advance will prepare the way for renewed interest and commitment to explicitly socialist ideas. During the campaign, shadow Chancellor John McDonnell spelled out his commitment to socialism. The election opens up a chance to remake the Labour Party into a strong political voice for working-class people, and extend the left-wing manifesto pledges towards a coherent scheme to change society.

As far as we can tell, most voters saw Labour as the party of "soft Brexit", and either backed that (seeing "Remain" as now improbable) or saw their preference for "hard Brexit" as less important than the NHS, the minimum wage, and so on. Labour has been able to get away with saying that it wants to



"retain the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union" (and yet not to be in them?); with denouncing "bogus immigration targets", promising to "take our fair share of refugees", and saying it will not "scapegoat migrants nor blame them for economic failures" (and yet pointedly not supporting free movement in Europe).

As Brexit talks start, especially with May weakened and people from many political quarters saying that her "hard Brexit" is now "dead in the water", a clearer stance will become not only a moral obligation but also a day-to-day political necessity.

CLASS

The election result saw politics once again polarising around class. The Conservative Party represented the capitalist ruling class; the Labour Party was supposed to represent the working class.

In the past, Labour lost support when the Blair and Brown Labour governments ostentatiously went for being "pro-business" and abandoned and even attacked working-class people. Many became alienated from politics. Some turned to minor parties, of the right (UKIP) or the relatively-left (the Greens). At this election those smaller parties shrank to insignificance, and the Lib-Dems failed to revive.

The contrast between this election, and the almost-simultaneous losses for the Dutch Labour Party and the French Socialist Party, which have continued a Blair-Brown-type line, shows that the "New Labour" approach leads only to a collapse of working-class political representation and of social hope.

Labour can win elections when it fights on working-class ideas that challenge ruling-class orthodoxy.

The Corbyn team's tactics of holding rallies in safe seats, using Corbyn's facility for speaking "on the stump", building support through social media, succeeded in the election campaign. Mobilisations to send new activists to marginals made seat gains and helped to close the gap elsewhere.

We have new opportunities for the labour movement — which at its best has always been the guardian of a working-class moral authority against capitalist realism — to reassert itself in political life.

Jeremy Corbyn, elected leader in a shock for the Labour right in September 2015, and harassed by them ever since, has increased his standing. Die-hard Blairites in Labour will

be forced to shut up for now. New space has been opened for the Labour revival, stuttering and on-off since 2015, to develop further.

We have no exact figures, but it looks as if there was a big increase in turnout among young voters, which had crashed to 38% in 2005, and a surge in young people registering to become voters.

The disconnect between many branch and constituency Labour parties, still run by an ageing few, and the majority of the membership, still exists.

In every constituency, we should look to build a Young Labour group, integrated with the CLP's activity, but offering young people a democratic and accessible centre for campaigning, discussion and social activity.

We cannot afford to miss the chances to build the organisational strength and reinvigorate the political culture of the labour movement.

We need solid local Momentum groups and Labour Party organisations, which meet regularly and take political debate seriously.

The left needs to step up the fight for an open, democratic Labour Party, against the still-strong old regime of bureaucratic manipulation and political purges.

Social media is a powerful tool, but we also need much more face-to-face campaigning on the streets.

Workers' Liberty and *Solidarity* exist, in the words of the Internationale, to bring "reason in revolt" into the movement, to forge the kind of class-struggle socialism we believe can arm the movement to win changes such as promised in the manifesto, and to go on to transform society thoroughly. At our Ideas for Freedom event on 1-2 July, activists old and new will discuss the lessons of past labour surges — and defeats — and the ideas needed now.

There are rumours that the new shadow cabinet will feature right-wingers who strove to undermine Corbyn before the election, but are now trying to worm back to top positions by claiming to be converted to unity. Letting the right-wing MPs regain strong positions would give them a stronger base to argue against democratic reform within the party.

The left group Momentum had a good election. Through well-placed use of social media, videos, email, its "marginals" smartphone app, and phone banking, it helped mobilise many Labour members who had joined to elect Corbyn, or after he was Corbyn elected, but had not been active.

Yet after the January "coup" by Momentum's national office, which abolished by decree all the group's elected structures, to replace them by a National Coordinating Group mostly not elected by the members and having little grip, many Momentum groups stopped meeting, or stopped having meetings where their members could vote on policies, or declined.

Momentum needs to be more than the election mobilising vehicle for the Labour leadership. Groups should start to meet again and put pressure for a truly democratic Momentum.

We need a Momentum group or caucus in every constituency, working to bring in new members, to campaign, and also democratically to transform the local party, its debates, its way of selecting candidates and representatives.

AMNESTY

Labour "auto-excluded" 618 members during the Labour leadership contest of summer 2016 alone, and no-one knows how many hundreds of others, mostly left-wingers, over the last two years.

Those members got no clear charges (let alone prior notice of them), no chance to answer charges, no hearing, and no right of appeal.

Many of them, including Workers' Liberty supporters, were active in the general election campaign, or even key organisers in their wards and local areas. A lot of new or newly-activated members will be shocked to find those campaigners barred from meetings. A new spirit of unity in the Labour Party will be good, but it should start with an amnesty for those expelled without due process, and a fight in each CLP to get it to write to the NEC and demand reinstatement.

Meanwhile, there is nothing in the Labour Party rule book to bar expelled members from attending ward and constituency meetings as observers.

Left-wingers have been working on a rule change motion for the 2018 Labour Party conference which would stop exclusions of members on the catch-all basis of support for organisations outside the Labour Party (taken literally, this formulation would justify summarily expelling any Labour member who is a member of CND, or Friends of the Earth, or such).

The basic criterion for Labour Party membership should be simple: to support the Labour candidate in all elections. In cases of alleged wrongdoing there should be a transparent disciplinary process in line with norms of "natural justice".

Labour Party conference 2016, despite coming soon after Jeremy Corbyn's second leadership-poll victory, was dominated by the Labour right. Momentum did nothing to intervene on conference floor.

We cannot afford to miss the new chances now given us for conference 2017. The left must organise quickly now to win delegates, particularly youth delegates, and to get parties to send their full entitlements. Delegates (and nominations for CAC and NCC, and rule-change proposals) have to be finalised by 7 July.

Constituency Labour Parties can also, in August or early September, submit "contemporary" motions, which have to refer to events after the end of July. Key issues to get on the agenda include: defending free movement; demanding the repeal of the Thatcher anti-trade-union laws as well as the Cameron law; and nationalising the banks.

Scotland: Nationalists in decline

By Dale Street

In Scotland the number of SNP MPs has fallen from 56 to 35. Scottish Tory MPs have increased from one to 13, Scottish Labour MPs have increased from one to seven, and Scottish Lib-Dem MPs have increased from one to four.

Eleven of the new intake of SNP MPs have majorities of less than 900. In some constituencies their majorities were wafer-thin.

The SNP's share of the popular vote fell from 50% in 2015 to 37%. The Tory share of the popular vote increased from 15% to 29%, while the Labour share increased from 24% to 27%. The Lib-Dem share fell slightly, from 7.5% to 7%.

In the language of Scottish politics: Unionist parties won 63% of the vote, and the sole pro-independence party in the election won 37%.

In other circumstances, winning 35 constituencies and 37% of the vote would be seen as a major victory for the SNP. And some of its cult-followers certainly see it in such simplistic terms. But they are wrong.

Last week's election marked another stage in the current decline of the SNP's electoral fortunes. In 2015 it won 50% of the popular vote. In 2016 it won 47% (constituency vote) and 42% (regional vote). In the 2017 council elections it won 32% of first preference votes (on a very low turnout).

The centrepiece of the SNP's politics — the demand for a second referendum on Scottish independence — took a bad hit in the general election. It was not the only reason for the fall in SNP support, but it was a major factor, especially in constituencies which switched from SNP to Tory.

The election also underlined the growing unpopularity of the cult-leader Nicola Sturgeon.

The SNP went into the election campaign promising to unseat the sole Tory MP left in Scotland after the 2015 election. Voting Tory, they claimed, was simply not Scottish. But now it turns out that nearly 30% of Scots who voted backed the "un-Scottish" Tories.

Even though Labour lost the election, the article of belief that England is inherently Tory (and the only salvation for Scotland therefore lies in independence) was exposed as a fallacy. Labour won 40% of the vote at a UK level — 3% more than the SNP's share of the vote in Scotland.

The SNP's illusion that they were Scotland's anti-austerity party, bravely defending Scotland against Tory cuts, was likewise exposed.

Many voters who switched from SNP to Tory rightly regarded the SNP's record in Holyrood as one of incompetence and failure rather than as one of anti-austerity. And voters who, in lesser number, switched from SNP to Labour, saw Labour as the party of real anti-austerity.

The election campaign run by the SNP also underlined its unbridled cynicism, opportunism and intolerance of dissent — both within its own ranks and also even outwith them.

During the second Scottish Leaders debate Sturgeon claimed that Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale had told her in a private conversation that she would drop Labour's opposition to a second referendum on Scottish independence. Dugdale has dismissed this as a lie. Irrespective of who was lying, the purpose of Sturgeon's statement was to drive opponents of a second referendum



away from voting Labour. In other words, Sturgeon was campaigning for a Tory vote.

At the start of the election campaign Sturgeon echoed the Tory and media line that Corbyn "ain't going anywhere near Downing Street." By the end of the campaign the SNP had switched to the dishonestly absurd argument that the only way to get a Labour government was to vote SNP.

Corbyn's true supporters in Scotland — said the SNP, word-for-word — were not Labour but SNP candidates. Apart from the claim's inherent absurdity, it ignored the fact that the proportion of pro-Corbyn Labour candidates in Scotland was probably greater than in England.

The Scottish Labour Party, the SNP argument continued, was autonomous from the Labour Party at a national level and did not support Corbyn. But for years past the SNP has dismissed Scottish Labour as a "branch office" of the Labour Party in London, incapable of taking a position different from its "Westmonster" office.

REFERENDUM

In East Lothian the SNP took out an advert in the local newspaper to tell voters that the election had nothing to do with a second referendum.

In Perth the SNP launched a campaign for the return of the Stone of Destiny, used over 700 years ago for the coronation of Scottish monarchs. (The Stone of Destiny was returned from London to Edinburgh Castle in 1996. But the Perth SNP campaign demanded its return — from Edinburgh — to Scone Abbey, near Perth.)

In Airdrie and Shotts the SNP distributed a leaflet showing a handshake with "Labour" and "Tory", written on the two handcuffs, and headed: "Labour Sell Out to the Tories." (At the same time the SNP leadership was calling for a "progressive alliance" with Labour.)

The more rational elements of the SNP leadership have registered the setback which the election result represents for the SNP and its demand for a second referendum. But some of its MPs and MSPs have argued that the result strengthens the campaign for independence. It is a different story with the SNP's cybernats and activist base: for them, only traitors to the nation voted Tory and oppose a second referendum:

"We, the SNP, won Scotland. The others won fuck all. We still have a triple mandate for independence, as promised. Traitorous bastards, we will remember who sold us down the river, you bastards. For it's coming yet fur aw' that."

Inevitably, new targets have been added

to the Scotsnat boycott list: an ice cream shop in Fochabers (for selling an ice cream cone to Ruth Davidson), the National Trust for Scotland (for not allowing its buildings to be defaced by SNP banners), and a shortbread shop in Edinburgh (which Ruth Davidson visited).

Cybernats have also constructed their own lying narrative to explain the Tory resurgence in Scotland and the election of a (minority) Tory government. Scottish Labour called for a vote for the Tories in selected constituencies; this enabled the Tories to win twelve new seats; if the Tories had not won those seats in Scotland, there would be no Tory government; like everything else, therefore, Scottish Labour is to blame for the Tories' "victory".

Knowing that only a handful of Tory voters will back independence, the SNP will continue to target Labour. Any calls by the SNP for a "progressive alliance" against the Tories would be no more than a feint designed to provide another pretext for denouncing Labour.

As the election campaign confirmed yet again, the SNP is a lying nationalist cult inherently hostile to the Labour Party and labour movement values.

Scottish Labour has emerged from the general election feeling more confident about its future. There are grounds for limited optimism.

Labour's share of the vote in Scotland was lower than that of the Tories for the first time in a general election since 1970. Scottish Labour won six new seats, but generally only with small majorities: 250, 250, 260, 850, 1,600, and 3,100.

Labour continues to suffer from the poison of national-identity-politics injected into Scottish politics by the SNP. The Tories have benefited from it. But Labour has yet to put class back at the centre of Scottish politics.

Labour election campaigning was generally low-key, reflecting Labour's ongoing weakness in Scotland. In general, only a few members in each CLP came out doorknocking and leafleting. And there was no serious social media strategy.

Unlike in England, there has been no large-scale influx of Corbyn supporters into Scottish Labour. Many CLPs do no more than, at best, tick over. Membership numbers remain low. And the Party's activist base is fairly minimal.

The Scottish Labour left needs to: recruit new Labour voters, especially youth, into the Party; organise them into a campaigning, activist left; and confront and break the grip which the right continues to exercise on broad swathes of Scottish Labour.

The DU

By Micheál MacEoin

The Conservative Party's loss of their parliamentary majority has left Theresa May reliant on Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), a hard-right organisation which has 10 MPs in the House of Commons. So who are the Tories' new unionist bedfellows?

The DUP has its roots in a politicised form of evangelical Protestantism which arose again in the 1950s and 60s, but has a long tradition in the Protestant areas of Ulster. In these years, the future DUP leader Ian Paisley was involved in a myriad of fringe loyalist organisations, which existed to protect Protestant supremacy in Northern Ireland.

In March 1963, a slightly more liberal Unionist Party leader, Terence O'Neill, became the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. His aim was to adopt a more moderate course in order to undercut support for the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) and absorb sections of the Catholic middle class in to the Northern Ireland state.

Paisley came to the fore as a rabble-rousing preacher, acting as a pole of attraction for discontent within working-class Protestantism. He articulated a form of religious-based Unionism with a more plebeian character than the aristocratic or business-oriented ruling Unionist Party.

As O'Neill's reforms encouraged the growth of a Catholic civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, Paisley helped set up the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee (UCDC), to co-ordinate street protests, rallies and counter-demonstrations against any moves towards liberalisation, ecumenism or attempted rapprochement with the Republic of Ireland.

The UCDC had an arms-length paramilitary section, the Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV), led by Paisley's longstanding ally, Noel Doherty. Doherty was later jailed for his involvement in a bombing campaign in 1969 designed to undermine O'Neill, which was carried out with members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

Paisley implausibly denied knowledge of Doherty's paramilitary activities. This is a pattern repeated by the DUP leader during the Troubles, of fraternising with violent loyalists while maintaining enough of a distance so as to deny knowledge of illegal or murderous acts.

For example, in 1974, Paisley would sit on the so-called "Ulster Workers' Council", along with representatives of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and other armed loyalist groups. It organised a general strike against the short-lived power-sharing executive, which in reality was initially more of a lock-out enforced by paramilitary intimidation.

Women's march Saturday 24 June, 12 noon

Marching in support of the right to access abortion, working agreement with no democratic mandate, policy which restricts the rights of women and the right to life.

All welcome. An inclusive short march will be held. More details: www.womenmarch.org.uk

DUP: the really nasty party

Again, in 1986, Paisley was present at a huge meeting in the Ulster Hall in Belfast to establish Ulster Resistance, a vigilante group set up to oppose the Anglo-Irish Agreement which promised Dublin more of a say in the running of Northern Ireland. Paisley was famously recorded calling for a paramilitary “Third Force” to oppose Irish republicanism, before placing a red beret on his head and standing to attention.

In 1987, the UVF and the UDA proceeded to smuggle weapons for Ulster Resistance from Lebanon in to Northern Ireland with the aid of Apartheid-era South African state agents. Most were intercepted, but some of the Ulster Resistance arms cache has never been found. By the late 1980s, pressure mounted on Paisley to condemn the group’s activities, which he did in 1989. Presumably, after calling for a paramilitary “Third Force”, Paisley only ever intended it to attack republicans peacefully, without weapons!

PEACE PROCESS

As the peace process took shape in the 1990s, the DUP came to the fore in opposing any agreement between unionists and republicans.

They campaigned against the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, when even the UDA was formally in favour.

This placed the party on the side of dissident anti-Agreement loyalists such as Billy Wright’s Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF). Indeed, in 1996, DUP representative Rev William McCrea shared a platform with Wright, mere months after the LVF murdered Catholic taxi driver Michael McGoldrick near Lurgan.

Support for the Good Friday Agreement fatally undermined Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble in the years after 1998. Unionist support for the Agreement was already weak, and the UUP could not stand the pressure from the DUP, who attacked them for sharing power with republicans while there were continuing delays in the decommissioning of IRA weapons. By the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly election, the DUP had overtaken the UUP as Northern Ireland’s most popular unionist party, a position they further cemented in future European, local government and Westminster elections.

2007 marked a watershed for the DUP. Having effectively destroyed their electoral competitors, the road was open for Ian Paisley to cut an agreement with Sinn Féin, and share power with republicans for the first time.

The DUP, then, has its roots in an evangelical fringe of Ulster loyalism. What does it stand for today?

For one thing, the DUP’s position as the largest unionist party, with support rooted in both the working-class and the Protestant



DUP leader Arlene Foster with UDA commander Dee Stiitt in 2017 (right) and a UDA mural (above)

business class, has led it to adopt a pragmatic blend of neoliberal pro-business policies such as corporation tax cuts, with an often populist approach. Its opposition to Tory plans to cut winter fuel payments, for example, will allow the Tories an excuse to reverse on some of their more unpopular proposals to attack universal benefits.

The DUP combines this right-wing economic pragmatism with a ferocious blend of religiously-inspired social conservatism, including opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion in all circumstances. One-third of DUP members are drawn from the evangelical Free Presbyterian Church, founded by Ian Paisley, which accounts for only 1% of the Northern Ireland population. Half of its elected representatives are members of the Orange Order, a virulently anti-Catholic Protestant fraternal organisation, and some are connected to pressure groups such as the Caleb Foundation which exists to promote “the fundamentals of the historic evangelical Protestant faith”, including support for creationism.

The DUP voter base, however, which is now larger and more varied, does not necessarily share all of these sentiments, at least not to the same degree.

Since becoming the dominant partner in government in Northern Ireland, the DUP’s time in office has also been plagued by a number of political and financial scandals, which will undoubtedly receive more UK-wide attention in light of recent events.

These include connections between senior DUP figures and the sale of properties owned by the Irish National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), and an ongoing investigation into DUP leader Arlene Foster’s role in the botched Renewable Heating Incentive (RHI) scheme.

Despite the DUP’s reactionary positions on social issues, it is most likely that the party will push for financial concessions for Northern Ireland as the price of any confidence and supply deal.

A 2015 DUP position paper outlined its priorities as being more capital spending for Northern Ireland, more funding for hospitals and schools, and cuts to air passenger duty. The DUP realises that social issues, such as same-sex marriage which it has repeatedly blocked, are devolved to Stormont. The party will gain little or nothing from drawing attention to these issues as part of a UK-wide deal with the Tories, and wants to present unionists as acting in the British “national interest.”

IGNORE

This does not, of course, mean that we should ignore the DUP’s social positions, or cease to condemn the Tories for cutting a desperate deal with such a reactionary party.

It is possible, too, that the DUP will come under pressure from its own base, including the Orange Order, to push for concessions on contentious issues, such as parading, flags and other areas of symbolic cultural importances to unionists.

The DUP supported Brexit in 2016, but opposes a hard Border in Ireland because of the economic damage that customs duties between Northern Ireland and the Republic would inflict.

However, its demands for a soft Border will be tricky to reconcile with its insistence that there be no new checks at ports and airports in Great Britain on citizens travelling from Northern Ireland into the UK after Britain exits the EU. The increased importance of the Irish dimension will, then, serve to further complicate the already chaotic state of the UK’s negotiations with the EU over Brexit.

Finally, the prospect of a Tory government propped up by a confidence and supply arrangement with the DUP puts profound strain on the already faltering power-sharing institutions at Stormont, and challenges some of the tenets of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Agreement rests on the conceit that the



British government is a “neutral broker” in the peace process. Republicans already deny that the Tories are in any sense neutral, and Secretary of State James Brokenshire has been widely attacked for showing a pro-unionist bias on issues such as the prosecutions of soldiers for activities during the Troubles. The fact of the Tories relying on DUP support for their parliamentary majority will complicate Brokenshire’s role in the ongoing negotiations between the parties at Stormont, especially if a condition of the DUP’s support for May is a statement ruling out any prospective vote on Irish unity.

Ironically, however, the DUP’s influence over the British government could hasten the return of Stormont’s power-sharing executive. Sinn Féin repeatedly rubbished any claim during the general election that Northern Ireland parties could wield any influence at Westminster. With the alternative to Stormont being direct rule from London by a DUP-backed Tory government, many Sinn Féin voters would understandably prefer Stormont as a lesser-evil. Republicans now too have reason to avoid a further Assembly election, as the DUP made a stunning comeback last week, increasing its support to unprecedented levels.

Any deal between the DUP and the Tories will be a limited one, restricted to votes of confidence such as the Queen’s Speech and the Budget. On individual issues, the Tories will be weak, and open to attack.

The labour movement, in the UK and Ireland, should drive a wedge between May and her DUP allies, using parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means to drive the Tories out of office.

against the DUP on Parliament Square

proportion in Northern Ireland and against a Tory date with a political group known to promote LGBT people and is known for links to far politics.

allow for kids and disabled participation.
bit.ly/2sXuqqe

Is the “social strike” anything new?

Daniel Randall examines the concept of the “social strike”.

As a workplace militant and trade union rep, I’m always interested in exploring “new kinds of strike action”. The group Plan C have written about “the social strike” as if it might be the key to overcoming the current weakness of organised labour as a social force.

Strike levels are at an historic low, so no-one could deny that we’re in a weak position, lacking combativity. Therefore anything that purports to be a strategy for overcoming that deserves attention.

But despite some fairly substantial engagement with Plan C on this issue (I spoke in a workshop entitled “socialising the Tube strikes” at their Fast Forward event in summer 2015, and Al Mikey from Plan C spoke at Workers’ Liberty’s Ideas for Freedom conference on the topic some weeks earlier), I still struggle to understand exactly what the “social strike” is.

Part of my difficulty stems from the fact that Plan C and their co-thinkers deploy the term in a variety of not-always-consistent ways. Sometimes it seems to be used to describe a “strike” that does not actually involve a withdrawal of labour by salaried workers, but a more amorphous social stoppage or disruption, perhaps by unpaid caregivers or paperless migrants.

This is the model described by the Roberta Ferrari from the Transnational Social Strike project, in which Plan C is involved, in an interview she gave to our newspaper *Solidarity* in October 2015: “What we want is to go beyond these forms of organisation [unions], to really attack precarity in its several faces, connecting different figures of labour inside and outside the workplaces, in the sphere of reproduction, both formal and informal.”

Alternatively it is used to describe a more “traditional” strike that seeks to “socialise” itself by taking action beyond the boundaries of the economic relationship between boss and worker — for example, “revenue strikes” by transport workers in which they open ticket turnstiles at train stations, allowing the public free transport.

As Al Mikey puts it in an interview with Callum on the topic, published on the Plan C website, the social strike is a “generalising process of antagonisms that goes beyond the initial conflict between labour and capital in production and into society.”

A fetishisation of novelty can sometimes blind us to the fact that what’s required is not “new kinds of strike action”, or new forms of organisation, but rather a rediscovery and re-learning of old lessons, ideas, and strategies, now forgotten or lost. We need, if you like, to get back to “the old new”; I’d emphasise in particular the period of “New Unionism” in the 1880s as providing models for how workers in so-called “new” industries, working with “new” kinds of employment arrangements (in fact, neither are truly “new”) might organise.

There’s something of a tendency amongst some on the left to both misidentify and overstate what’s “new” in all of this. Read some of the analysis on the “gig economy”, and the related concept of the “precarariat”, any you’d be forgiven for thinking that, very shortly, no-one in Britain will have a salaried job anymore, and no large workplaces will exist, but rather we’ll all be, to use Nathan Barley’s prophetic phrase, “self-facilitating media nodes”.

To some that might even be a good thing, something to welcome; others argue it will render us incapable of organising against our auto-exploitation at a workplace level and in a collective way, because we don’t have a workplace and aren’t part of a collective.

But ... the Deliveroo and UberEats strikes should put paid to the idea that “gig economy” workers can’t organise. And, beyond this, there are still plenty of mass workplaces around, and they are still absolutely essential to capitalist economic functioning. A university, a hospital, or a supermarket distribution centre has more in common with an old-style industrial combine or factory complex than it does with the “gig economy”. The notorious warehouses of Sports Direct and Amazon are more like 19th century mills than anything “new”.

In industries and sections of the economy that still have the most strategic importance to capital, such as transport and energy, workers retain a high degree of what one might call “old-fashioned” industrial leverage. Certainly, precarious forms of work exist in these industries too (outsourcing and hyper-exploitative, bogus self-employment is rife on the railways, particularly amongst cleaners and track workers), but the extent to which these phenomena are entirely new is arguable: the dock workers in the 1880s, integral to “New Unionism”, had acutely precarious forms of employment, but also immense leverage and power.

RECOMPOSITION

The issue in industries like transport and energy today, and in other hugely strategic sectors like education and logistics, is not that an objective process of “recomposition” (another term beloved of Plan C) has taken place which has rendered workers powerless.

The missing elements are subjective: levels of organisation, and fundamentally, consciousness.

In the aforementioned interview, Al discusses how he and his comrades related to the 2011 public sector strikes. “Only people already in unions could go on strike”, he says. This is straightforwardly untrue: anyone in a workplace where a strike is taking place can participate in that strike, whether they’re a member of the union organising it or not. It’s not clear what the critique here actually is; perhaps it is that the mass public sector unions had failed to also organise strikes in the workplaces and industries where Al and his comrades worked.

Al describes the work the proto-Plan C group... did around the 2011 strike: “Following that we had multiple assemblies leading up to both strike days, and then on the days themselves we organised two blockades, one in north London, one in south London. The idea was that we would basically march from picket to picket. In the end it involved 200-300 people in each blockade, with sound systems and stuff. There was already this idea of opening up strike participation, trying to find our way towards a general strike.”

This is all admirable, useful, and necessary. But the implied relationship between proto-Plan C and the strike itself is one of intervention from the outside. There’s no sense that any of the comrades involved in this work might have been strikers, or union reps, themselves (even though some of them probably were), intervening directly in their unions to attempt to build rank-and-file organisation and an alternative direction for the strike.

There’s a potentially very problematic logic to some of this; if we’re aiming to make a given strike the property of the whole class, so to speak, and to generalise participation, we have to be careful we don’t act in such a way as to undermine the impact of the strike.

These potential problems become more acute in other Plan C comrades’ writing on the issue. In his article “On Social Strikes and Directional Demands”, Plan C’s Keir Milburn writes, of a 1995 transport workers’ strike in Paris, “the disruption of transport revealed a key point of leverage but also because the strike seemed to have made Paris more sociable in some ways. In order to deal with the strike people had to cooperate more, perhaps by car pooling or walking together and therefore getting a different perspective on the city. It was this increased sociability that provoked the title ‘social’ strike but this dimension seems to have been lost a bit in recent discussions.”

This treads an extremely fine line. It’s worryingly close to the “how Londoners beat the Tube strike”-type rhetoric one regularly encounters in the Evening Standard or on LBC during our strikes, which happily sneers that our strike wasn’t that disruptive after all, as people took the bus, or rode a scooter, or... car pooled, even, to get to work. It also has echoes of the Green Party’s community clean-ups during Brighton bin workers’ strikes. If “socialising a strike” means “finding ways for people not involved in it to minimise its impact”, count me out.

Back to 2011, and Al critiques the mechanistic calls from the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers’ Party for the TUC to “call a general strike”, but, despite identifying “the problem of power and counterpower”, the strategy he describes appears like a more-left-wing version of the same thing — an attempt to find a shortcut to “generalise the strike” without the existence of the subjective element necessary to do that: a consciously and independently-organised rank-and-file, acting as a counterweight to the power of the bureaucracy. That element must be developed within workplaces and within the existing unions.

Al says: “Traditionally power came from mass collective action at the point of production, but we couldn’t replicate that, because we ourselves weren’t involved in it.” ... Fine; when workers from a workplace in which we have no comrades go on strike, Workers’ Liberty necessarily relates to the strike “from the outside”, seeking to support it and help amplify it, and, if we can, to engage the workers in discussions about the direction of the strike. But we are still relating to it from within the broad labour movement (we can build solidarity with the strike within our own workplaces and unions). We don’t extrapolate from our external position that “mass collective action at the point of production” might in some way be old hat.

The way Al seems to conceive of “the social strike” in this interview implies a permanently external, rather than integral, relationship between a strike and those trying to “socialise” it. But the agency most fundamentally capable of “socialising” a strike is surely the group of striking workers themselves.

What is lacking from any of this is any perspective for transforming the existing labour movement. I’m well aware that for many in Plan C, this is not the starting point... but a mass labour movement still exists. It comprises seven million members, and represents the accumulated experience, for better and worse, of 200 years of struggle. It is the organ-

ically-generated expression of class conflict, given organisational form. It is profoundly, abjectly inadequate, but it has to be gone through, not around.

Even independent and minority-union projects like the Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain and the United Voices of the World, are in some sense defined by their relationship to the mass labour movement.

And in the current moment, when an immense political upheaval is taking place inside Labour, the political party founded by and structurally linked to the trade union movement, one might imagine that one way to explore the “socialisation” of strikes, to generalise the antagonisms expressed in them, might be to join that party...

Undoubtedly, in a high pitch of struggle the labour movement itself will be “recomposed”. But to achieve that requires the development of a consciously transformative project within the existing movement — an insurgent rank-and-file which aims to radically democratise unions, make them more combative and militant, and expand them into currently unorganised sections of the economy.

REFERENCE

Plan C’s key historical reference point often seems to be the Italian workers’ movement of the 1960s and 70s.

I would urge the comrades to look at experiences such as the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation in the 1970s, and the work of Farrell Dobbs, Carl Skoglund, the Dunne brothers, and others in Local 574 of the Teamsters’ union in Minneapolis (whose story is told in the book *Teamster Rebellion*) for other examples of how a coherently organised group of revolutionary workers within a particular industry and union can act as a lever to effect substantial transformation, catalyse struggles, and win victories.

Plan C comrades might even recognise an early conception of the “social strike”, of the strike as “an accelerant”, which poses “the question of power and counterpower” in society at large, in Leon Trotsky’s *The Transitional Programme* (1938). Responding to factory occupations such as the one by of auto workers in Flint, Michigan, in 1936, Trotsky wrote: “Sit-down strikes [occupations] go beyond the limits of ‘normal’ capitalist procedure. Independently of the demands of the strikers, the temporary seizure of factories deals a blow to the idol, capitalist property. Every sit-down strike poses in a practical manner the question of who is the boss in the factory: the capitalist or the workers?”

If that is what Plan C mean by the “social strike” — taking a strike “beyond the limits of ‘normal’ capitalist procedure” — then that is an aim we wholeheartedly share. To amplify what those of us in the Trotskyist tradition might call the “transitional” logic of every strike should certainly be the aspiration of revolutionaries.

But without an orientation to the existing labour movement, the mechanism through which the vast majority of strikes will still take place and the mass social expression of class conflict in organisational form, and a perspective for transforming it, bureaucratic control of our movement will persist, and the growth of class power will be stunted.

• This article is abridged. For the full article and further discussion on the topic see: bit.ly/2thbe6q

A tale that is close to home

Rosalind Robson reviews *The Handmaid's Tale*, currently airing on Channel 4.

When the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985, its author, Margaret Atwood, was concerned about the growing strength of Christian fundamentalism in US politics. Unfortunately her story is still very relevant, in fact more relevant, thirty years later.

In 1985 Ronald Reagan was in the White House. His attitude to the Christian right (which in fact has a long tradition in US politics) was one of containment. Yes, Reagan campaigned to reverse a ban on school prayers, and he himself was a nasty anti-abortionist. However, concerned about keeping a broad base of Republican support, Reagan did not overly encourage the so-called "moral majority".

Nonetheless the growing confidence and organisational weight of the US Christian right — in and around the Republican Party, through churches, charitable and educational foundations — scared Atwood. By her own account she was also thinking about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the founding of a theocracy in Iran while writing the novel.

The strength of the novel is that Atwood did not depict anything that had not already happened in human history. From big things to small — patriarchal privileges, street-level and state-sponsored misogyny, compulsory praying, religious war, deportation to the colonies, groups mobilised by fear to condemn and take revenge — all these things are features of all kinds of totalitarianism, and theocracy in particular. By bringing to us an



onslaught of scary behaviours, Atwood provokes a recognition for the reader with not only the beliefs of "others" — some people at the fringes of society or in some other country "over there" — but within ourselves.

Who has not taken mild revenge to assuage bad feelings; or pointed the finger to be "one of the gang"? Are any of us who seek moral renewal in politics in danger of excluding those who fail to live up to our expectations?

As science fiction this is an experiment in political thinking, not a detailed political treatise. There is, of course, a radical break between ordinary bad behaviour and the evils of fascism and totalitarianism. Atwood prob-

ably intended to express no more than a left liberal sensibility. And good for her, we need more political consciousness.

It is good that Bruce Miller has brought Atwood's collage of scary behaviours and pious beliefs to the small screen, and so very effectively. This is a powerful novel, one which many irate Christian parents and others have tried to ban since it was first published, and managed to ban in some US schools.

More power to it against the likes of Trump whose only real god is money! And against his Number 2 at the White House, Mike Pence, a man who tries very hard to be more pious than the Pope.

The TV depiction benefits from Elisabeth Moss's portrayal of June/Offred, a woman who has been enslaved and separated from her child. In this world where environmental pollution has nearly destroyed human fertility, any fertile woman like Offred must become a Handmaid, a breeder, to live with a ruling-class man and wife, to be ritually raped by him so that she will be impregnated and then bear a child for him and his wife.

Moss plays a woman always on the edge of despair, always in fear but determined to survive. Through her eyes we see how in this kind of world everyday life, potentially everyone you meet, even acts of human kindness, become treacherous.

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Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
 - A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
 - A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
 - Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
 - A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression.
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
 - Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
 - Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
 - Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
 - Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.



If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

More online at www.workersliberty.org Workers' Liberty @workersliberty

Build solidarity with the Picturehouse strike



Joe Booth, a young socialist, writes his thoughts about the importance of linking the Picturehouse workers' struggle to the struggle in the Labour Party.

Since October 2016 Workers' Liberty has been helping the dispute of Picturehouse workers for the Living Wage, sick pay, and maternity/paternity pay.

People should support the Picturehouse workers in their fight for a Living Wage and use the momentum of the Labour election gains to build solidarity.

If Labour had won the general election the minimum wage would have increased to £10 per hour. But we still want to push the social democracy under Jeremy Corbyn's leftism forward. A Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn will

not mean the end of capitalism, but it would change the balance of forces between the ruling class drive to increase austerity, inequality and poverty, and our drive to resist and push the other way. The huge shift to Labour over the course of the election was a reflection of class struggle in Britain.

SOLIDARITY

Solidarity means that as revolutionary and radical far-left socialists you address everyone on your side's issues, you fight the same oppression that they're fighting.

One solidarity action that we want to achieve is the transformation of the entire labour movement, unity against all forms of oppression and, most importantly a workers' government.

There are other workers who re-

ject politics and only participate in these activities when it comes to their attention. As revolutionary socialists, we need to show some sympathy to those workers who are separate from politics and nihilistically turn to hatred. It is no coincidence that capitalism makes desperate people believe anything.

The Picturehouse workers need success, our solidarity will be important in building that. A mass movement is a tactic, but also a radical form of democracy, because the people are being led to power and the workers have the capacity to own the means of production.

We should bypass the trade union bureaucracy, to take advantage of all forms of rebellion in society and use this politics to help convince the working class.

• More on the Picturehouse strikes on page 12

Events

Friday 16 June

"Austerity Fight" film premiere
6.30pm, Rich Mix Cinema, Bethnal Green Road, London E1 6LA
bit.ly/2qxJRnG

Saturday 17 June

No need for nuclear: the renewables are here
9.45am, Conway Hall
25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL
bit.ly/2s9RkKT

17-18 June

NCAFC summer conference
From 10am Saturday, University of the Arts London, 272 High Holborn, WC1V 7EY
bit.ly/2rABXOm

Monday 19 June

Protest the Queen's Speech
6pm, Parliament Square, London
bit.ly/2rqsc0E

Saturday 24 June

Women's march on Downing Street against the DUP
12 noon, Parliament Square, London
bit.ly/2rqvsZY

Wednesday 28 June

Lobby Greenwich Council: No School Cuts
6.30pm, Woolwich Town Hall, Powis St, London SE18 6HQ
bit.ly/2tgohov

Have an event you want listing? Email: solidarity@workersliberty.org

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Victory for cleaners' strike

By Gemma Short

Cleaners at the London School of Economics are celebrating a victory. They will be brought in-house and become employees of LSE from Spring 2018.

The victory comes after a series of strikes and protests over 10 months. Three more strikes had been planned for LSE's July graduation days. LSE became increasingly embarrassed by the strikes and protests, and lashed out at workers, issuing legal threats and trying to intimidate workers into not striking.

As a result of being brought in-house from infamous contractor Noonan, the cleaners will get 41 days annual leave, six months full-pay sick pay with six months half-pay sick pay, plus proper employer pension contributions of up to 13% of their salary.

This is a significant victory which will hopefully impact upon disputes in other HE institutions where cleaning, catering and other staff are outsourced. Workers at the University of London won pay increases and some improvements to conditions in 2012-13, but remained



outsourced. Similar disputes at other institutions have so far failed to break the hold of outsourcing companies and bring workers back in-house despite significant gains in pay and conditions.

As *Solidarity* goes to press students at SOAS university, London, have occupied the Director's office in protest at the university closing a cafeteria leading to redundancies. Workers and students at SOAS have run a long campaign against outsourcing and poor pay and conditions amongst outsourced staff.

The shock announcement to close the cafeteria was made on the 9th anniversary of the deportation of the SOAS 9 — when cleaning company ISS called cleaners into a meeting where immigration police were waiting to arrest and deport people.

Unison will be balloting catering workers over the closure and redundancies.

• For updates on the struggle at SOAS see: facebook.com/SOASJ4C

Beating the anti-union laws on the Tube

Tube union RMT has balloted its members working on London Underground stations for industrial action to win the reinstatement of Lee Cornell, a Customer Service Assistant at London Bridge who was sacked after an altercation with an aggressive customer who had pushed a pregnant colleague. The ballot closes on 13 June. *Solidarity* spoke to an RMT rep about the campaign to get the vote out.



This has been quite a monumental effort for us.

It's our first combine-wide ballot since the Tories' Trade Union Act was imposed, so presented some real challenges. We'd already failed to meet the new thresholds in a local ballot in the same dispute on the Waterloo area, so it was very obvious we had to step things up.

There's been a well coordinated campaign to mobilise members to vote, and to vote yes. Local workplace reps like myself have been working through our membership lists, speaking to as many members in person as possible about the ballot, and ticking them off once we know they've voted.

There have been regular texts and emails from union head office, and some phonebanking was organised at RMT HQ.

Union branches have been or-

ganising walkabouts on the stations they organise to make sure as many members as possible are reached, and the dispute is kept high profile.

There's no denying that there's been a certain complacency historically: some members, who are totally union-loyal and always take part in industrial action, have had the attitude that there's no particular need for them to return their ballot, as there'll almost certainly be a majority for action, and they'll support the strike when it's called. With the new laws in force, those attitudes have to be confronted and changed. More long term, we need to think about ways of defying and subverting these obviously unjust laws, even while we're working hard to hit the ballot thresholds.

We've been conducting our campaign in the face of some quite outrageous spin and distortion from management, putting about lies

and propaganda via employee bulletins, which we've had to work hard to counter. On the whole I think this has backfired on management; one claim they pushed particularly hard was that RMT officers had refused their offers to view CCTV of the incident that led to Lee's sacking, which is a straightforward fabrication. Members can see the bosses are trying to lie their way out of a corner and I think it's galvanised people's will to fight for Lee's reinstatement.

The issues at the heart of the dispute are simple: our workplaces are not always safe environments, and are becoming less so as LU and other railway companies look to cut back on staffing levels.

Lee was defending himself and his colleague from assault by a violent customer, and rather than backing him up, his employer has sacked him. That's an unacceptable injustice.



Sheffield job centre closure strike

By Lottie Jeffries

Workers at Eastern Avenue job centre in Sheffield struck on Friday 2 June, and started a week-long strike on Monday 12 June, against the closure of the job centre.

The first strike day was very successful after a colossal 92% vote in favour of strikes. The picket was supported by community activists, Momentum and the Labour Party.

All DWP buildings are up for contract renewal in April 2018. The DWP plans to take the opportunity to downsize by closing about 100 offices, 73 of them public-facing offices. There will be even more closures in three years' time.

Although these plans are still in consultation, Eastern Avenue staff know that their office is on the list and are keen to let management know, while consultation is taking place, what they think of the idea — not just for them and their clients

but for the other offices under threat as well. The consultation has been put on hold during the General Election, meaning the staff cannot get answers to their questions.

The closure would not, at least for now, mean redundancies or changes in contracts for the staff. The main change for them is that they would have to travel into the centre of Sheffield to go to work. However, for their clients, it is disastrous. As Tom Bishell, PCS union rep, told *Solidarity*, "This is a local community job centre. The staff here know the clients and their situations. They know the lone parents, the disabled."

"It costs a lot of money to get into town. And when they get there it would be to a large, impersonal and intimidating office, like a supermarket, where nobody knows them".

• Send messages of support to: tombishell@yahoo.co.uk

Cabin crew strike again

By Peggy Carter

Mixed fleet cabin crew working for British Airways at Heathrow will strike again from Friday 16 June to Monday 19 June.

Workers in the mixed fleet had been striking over poverty pay levels, but strikes had been suspended for talks.

The latest strikes have been prompted by British Airways' attempts to victimise those who took part in earlier strikes. According to the workers' union Unite, talks had been near to resolving the dispute over pay, but British Airways was refusing to restore travel conces-



sions that had been removed from striking staff.

Unite commented "BA is almost alone among the employers this union has dealt with in that they can accept the case for a pay deal but want to punish the very people who made the case."

Manchester Met strikes

By Gemma Short

UCU members at Manchester Met University will strike on Tuesday 20 and Wednesday 21 June.

Workers were due to strike on 24

and 25 May in a dispute over 160 job losses and the closure of the Crewe campus, but strikes were called off after the Manchester Arena terror attack.

The university has so far refused to attend talks with the union.



Picturehouse victimises trade union reps

By a Picturehouse worker

Picturehouse cinemas have suspended seven Bectu trade union reps, in the midst of ongoing strike action.

The dispute for a Living Wage, decent sick pay, maternity/paternity pay, and union recognition has run for over 10 months so far. Over forty strike days have been held across six Picturehouse cinemas. Most recently workers at five of the cinemas struck on 3-4 June, disrupting the Sundance film festival which Picturehouse was hosting.

Picturehouse, and its parent company Cineworld, have adopted an aggressive strategy of intimidation in response to the strikes. Since the beginning of the dispute they have been threatening both workers and their union Bectu with legal action, over a number of spurious allegations, such as playing "racial music" on the picket line.

The suspension of all six trade union reps from the Ritzy cinema in Brixton, and one rep from Hackney Picturehouse, marks an attempt to behead the dispute by removing some of its key organisers. The Ritzy is where the strikes originated.

The allegations being levelled against the reps refer to protest activity undertaken by supporters of the campaign on strike days, not

the workers themselves. These protests were discussed in a cross-site union meeting and over e-mail, which was then leaked to management.

Infamously unscrupulous, Picturehouse may have made a calculation that they would rather risk paying out large sums in compensation following tribunals, in order to undermine the strike now.

Already news of the suspensions has been met with considerable criticism. The shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, weighed in on the subject,

"The whole labour movement will stand shoulder to shoulder with victimised workers at the Ritzy cinema and across the Picturehouse chain.

"Actions such as these from Picturehouse management are an attack on all of us and they reflect an economy in which it has become normal for workers to be precarious, underpaid and exploited.

"We will outlaw zero hours contracts and make sure that everyone is paid a real living wage, and we will ensure that workers have access to justice and that big corporations cannot act with impunity."

In the event of dismissals then it is important that McDonnell's words are made true.

The Picturehouse dispute isn't just important because the workers need a pay rise. Workers have



organised in a sector that is typically seen as impossible to organise, and they've grown their dispute from one to six cinemas, with more expected to follow in the coming weeks. Up against a multinational Goliath, they've come under a lot of pressure but have stood fast. The whole labour movement needs to mobilise to support us.

The suspensions represent the greatest attack by the company on the campaign to date, but also an

opportunity. After bosses were forced into saying they would meet the union after being confronted by workers at Cineworld's AGM, a negotiation meeting is set for the end of the month.

A strong response to these victimisations could mark a decisive turn in the campaign.

Support the victimised reps:

• Send messages of protest to: Mooky.Greidinger@cineworld.co.uk

• Send messages of support to: ritzylivingwage@gmail.com, twitter: @RitzyLivingWage and @HPHLivingWage

• Donate to the strike fund: www.crowdpac.co.uk/campaigns/250/picturehousestrike

• Sign the petition: www.change.org/p/picturehouse-pay-proper

• Find out more about the dispute: www.picturehouselivingwage.com

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